

Press release – Wednesday, November 15th, 2023

iLiana Fokianaki appointed new Director of Kunsthalle Bern

The Board of Kunsthalle Bern announces the appointment of iLiana Fokianaki as its new Director. iLiana Fokianaki brings a wide range of experience as a curator, writer, theorist, and founding director of State of Concept, an independent art institution in Athens, Greece. She will begin her tenure in April 2024. She succeeds Kabelo Malatsie, who has served as Kunsthalle Bern's Director since April 2022 and who concludes her tenure in February 2024.

Speaking on behalf of the seven-member selection committee, the co-presidents of Kunsthalle Bern's Board, Lorenza Donati and Benjamin Dodell, are delighted to have found in iLiana Fokianaki a Director whose experience at the intersections of curatorial practice and societal change will serve Kunsthalle Bern well in the coming years. Both Fokianaki's previous activities as well as her proposal for the Kunsthalle Bern reflect her strong engagement with the context in which her curatorial work unfolds.

iLiana Fokianaki recognizes that Kunsthalle Bern has carved a remarkable trajectory as a leading institution in contemporary art in Europe and beyond, and that it has served as an important catalyst for artistic practice, proposing institutional and curatorial positions that have shifted the prevailing paradigm in the field. She reacted to her appointment by stating that "I am thrilled to have been chosen to lead the institution and I envision a pivotal role for Kunsthalle Bern in fostering a shift around what it means to 'institute art' in the concurrent ecological, social, and political crises of our time, an undertaking I am occupied with through my current research and curatorial work." Fokianaki conceives of institutions as important content generators, which are: "ethical, diverse, and democratic, creating links with different disciplines and geographical regions, supporting artistic practices to thrive, while generating alliances and promoting symbiosis with other actors. All of which demonstrate some key challenges art institutions will face in the near future: how to be sustainable and lead an ecologically conscious practice, how to reflect and represent the concept of social justice and the rich plurality of contemporary society through its programme."

Fokianaki's curatorial interests are formulated through exhibition chapters along with public programmes, publications, and research platforms. She has furthermore nurtured networks with other art institutions with whom State of Concept has co-produced exhibitions and events such as e-flux New York, Kunsthall Trondheim, Kunstinstituut Melly Rotterdam, Moderna galerija Ljubljana, KADIST Paris, BAK Utrecht, and co-commissioned works with institutions such as Dhaka Art Summit, among others.

Selection process via open call

An open call for a new Director was launched by the Board of Kunsthalle Bern in June 2023, which appointed a selection committee comprising three external experts and four Board members (see below). The selection committee was impressed by Fokianaki's proposal of a multi-year programme which borrows from the ecological approach of *permaculture*, actively engaging artists, the team, the wider public, various stakeholders, and communities in the city of Bern and beyond. The selection committee also noted Fokianaki's experience in skillfully leading institutions and their teams, her curatorial expertise and her self-reflective, multi-disciplinary approach to contemporary artistic and curatorial practice and discourse. They went on to state that "she has the practical experience, network and critical awareness to

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bring a curatorial and managerial approach to Kunsthalle Bern that is informed and nourished by her long-standing practice, engagement and organizing work.”

Fokianaki's tenure follows **Kabelo Malatsie**'s directorship of Kunsthalle Bern. Malatsie's curatorial approach has questioned the fixity of hierarchical and authoritative attitudes to artistic and institutional practice by inviting a range of artistic practitioners to create moving experiential and spatial installations. In so doing, Malatsie has challenged art historical and canonical notions of art or indeed exhibitions as stable categories, through a series of solo and group shows featuring, among others, Ivana Franke, Rahima Gambo, Simnikiwe Buhlungu, Lantian Xie, Jackie Karuti, Nolan Oswald Dennis, Tabita Rezaire and Bogosi Sekhukhuni. Notably, the curatorial research project titled “7 Winds” ran parallel to the solo exhibitions over fourteen months, including installations, sound and performance-based works curated by Malatsie, Julia Künzi and Camilla Paolino. The current show at Kunsthalle Bern features Deborah-Joyce Holman's solo exhibition *Living Room* (until December 3, 2023) alongside an event-based programme by practitioners who work with sound, performance, theatre, literature, curating, theory, and teaching (until January 30, 2024).

Malatsie's final exhibition at Kunsthalle Bern will open in mid-February 2024. The Board and the team of Kunsthalle Bern wish to express their thanks and profound appreciation to Kabelo Malatsie both for bringing such a range of artistic perspectives, practices, questions, and locations to bear on the institution's imagination, as well as for her deeply thoughtful, precise, and dedicated stewardship of the Kunsthalle.

About iLiana Fokianaki

iLiana Fokianaki is a curator, theorist, and educator. She has a compelling record of group and solo exhibitions and research projects in institutions worldwide. As the founder and director of State of Concept Athens since 2013, she has changed the landscape of the Athens art scene, bringing to the capital of Greece exhibitions of artists such as Forensic Architecture, Kader Attia, Kapwani Kiwanga, Basim Magdy, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Laure Prouvost, Sanja Iveković, Uriel Orlow, Anton Vidokle and others. She is the founder of research platform ‘The Bureau of Care’ that has been foregrounding conversations around the politics and ethics of care since 2020. She has curated exhibitions for international institutions such Museo Reina Sofia Madrid, e-flux New York, La Colonie Paris, KADIST Paris, Kunstinstituut Melly Rotterdam, Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova Ljubljana and has curated public programmes for Vera List Center for Art and Politics New York, Het Nieuwe Instituut Rotterdam, Goethe Institut a.o. Fokianaki has been lecturing at the Dutch Art Institute Arnhem and academies, independent spaces, museums, and foundations worldwide. She publishes regularly in journals such as e-flux and Frieze among others and has participated in several publications. Her books “Gossips: WomXn Gather” and “The Bureau of Care” will be published in 2024 with Archive Books.

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Selection committee

Hicham Khalidi, director of the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht and curator of the Dutch Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2024

Andrea Thal, artistic director of Contemporary Image Collective CIC in Cairo and convenor of the Sommerakademie Paul Klee 2023/24 in Bern

Franciska Zólyom, director of the Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst in Leipzig

Anisha Imhasly (chair of the selection committee), member of the Board of Kunsthalle Bern since 2015, cultural consultant and coach, Bern

Lorenza Donati, co-president of the Board of Kunsthalle Bern (since 2023) and member of the Board since 2020, architect, co-founder of ALIAS architects and lecturer at ETH, Zürich

Benjamin Dodell, co-president of the Board of Kunsthalle Bern (since 2023) and member of the Board since 2022, head of marketing, Bern University of the Arts (HKB), publisher of "Edition Benjamin Dodell" and board member of Visarte Switzerland since 2014

Berit Seidel, member of the Board of Kunsthalle Bern since 2023, artist, U5 Collective, Zürich

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Kunsthalle Bern is an internationally renowned venue for engaging with contemporary art. Since its founding, by artists, in 1918, it has offered a unique space for presenting, testing, and discussing contemporary artistic practice.

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